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SUBJECT: TAJIK MEDIA NAMES RUSSIAN AMBASSADOR "DIPLOMAT OF THE YEAR"

¶1. (U) A New Year's tradition, Tajikistan's electronic news agency "Asia Plus" and Russian-language independent paper "Kurier Tajikistana" published best of the year lists, sourced from editors' personal opinions and popularity polls, and the diplomatic community wasn't left out of their end of the year analysis. "Asia Plus" ranked Russian Ambassador Ramazan Abdulatipov as "Diplomat of the Year." In "Kurier Tajikistana," Abdulatipov edged out Ambassador Hoagland 16 - 7 for "Most Active Diplomat."

¶2. (U) "Asia Plus," published a lengthy section on Abdulatipov that praises him for being the first Muslim Russian Ambassador to Tajikistan as well as a famous scientist and statesman. He was also lauded for his "zealous work in Tajikistan that overshadowed his colleague, Ambassador Hoagland."

¶3. (SBU) COMMENT. The Tajik mass media is ever quick to pit the United States against Russia on all manner of issues. This is not always negative, however, as papers, editors, and issues swing between the two camps, keeping readers engaged in what the two countries are doing in Tajikistan. The influence of Russian media organs, the Tajik State-owned press, and cautious self-censorship continue to remain an issue with free independent press in Tajikistan, but rare moments of open criticism and free expression have been, and continue to be, present. END COMMENT.

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